



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Den Internationale Migrationsorganisation (IOM)

Mr. Thomas vom Braucke

Finance and Accommodation Division
Danish Immigration Service
Ryesgade 53
2100 Copenhagen

Copenhagen, 4 August 2017

Re: Final report to the Danish Immigration Service on the "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project" – 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015.

Dear Mr. vom Braucke,

I am pleased to submit to the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) on behalf of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the final narrative and financial report for the "*Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project*."

While the formal implementation period of the project was 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015, the project for operational reasons remained open well into 2016, while some individual cases were open as late as 2017. This is the main reason for the late reporting and reflected in the narrative report.

As specified in the enclosures, IOM registered assistance to 299 persons, who returned voluntarily from Denmark to their country of origin during the project, which implemented activities by IOM under the Support Programme I (*Støtteordningen I*).

While the 299 persons are less than the initial expectation, it is highly probable that the overall number of returns from Denmark in 2013 would have been smaller, had their not been an offer of return and reintegration support under the project. As such, the project responded to clear needs amongst the target group in Denmark. Concurrently, it facilitated the work of the Danish authorities by offering a well-defined and voluntary alternative to government facilitated returns, hence clarifying who were cooperating on the return and who not.

It can be noted that IOM's figures on persons assisted under the Support Programme might differ slightly from the figures of the Danish authorities as a number of persons returned without the assistance of IOM. Returns of eligible persons in 2017, of which some assisted by IOM under other project structures, are also not reflected in the current report.

In the project, IOM registered a project expenditure of total USD 2,198,324 out of a received contribution of USD 2,194,946.

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The project balance therefore remains at **USD 716,622** in the favour of the DIS. As per the Project Agreement, unused funds will be returned to the donor unless otherwise agreed between the parties.

IOM would like to propose that the remaining funds could be channelled towards project activities in support of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) from Denmark. This would fall within the objective of the project and in extension of the overall aim of the Support Programme to facilitate cooperation on return. As IOM has expressed on separate occasions, IOM sees a clear need for continued AVRR assistance to asylum seekers in Denmark. Including but not limited to pre-departure counselling, voluntary return travel arrangements from Denmark and reintegration assistance in countries of origin.

According to our information, the DIS funded counselling for asylum seekers in Denmark (*Rådgivningstjenesten*) concurs with the need for AVRR as an important element of the provided counselling in view of voluntary returns from Denmark.

We would like to thank the Danish Immigration Service for the cooperation on the Support Programme. IOM stands ready to discuss the above proposal with you, as well as any other issues pertaining to the enclosed reports, the project or IOM's work in general.

Yours sincerely,



Simo Kohonen,
Chief of Mission

Enclosures:

- Narrative final report on the "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project" – 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015.
- Financial final report on the "Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project" – 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015.



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Final Report to The Danish Immigration Service

Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project (AVRR-DK)

Project Data Table

Executing Organization:	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Project Identification and Contract Numbers:	IOM project code: RT.0782 IOM LEG approval code: DNK/FDNK/AL0087/2013 AVRR
Project Management Site and Relevant Regional Office:	Management Site: Copenhagen, CO, DENMARK Regional Office: Brussels, RO, BELGIUM
Project Period:	1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015 (extension 1 November 2013 to 31 March 2014, 1 April 2014 to 30 June 2014, 1 July to 30 September 2014, 1 October to 31 December 2014, 1 January to 31 March 2015, 1 April to 30 June 2015 ¹)
Geographical Coverage:	Denmark and countries of return
Project Beneficiaries:	Asylum seekers in Denmark who want to return voluntarily
Project Partner(s):	The Danish Immigration Service (DIS), the Danish Police (UCN), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
Reporting Period:	Final narrative report: 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015 Final financial report: 1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015
Date of Submission:	04 August 2017
Total Confirmed Funding:	USD 2,914,976 (originally USD 1,785,300 amended to USD 2,914,976 on 2 nd amendment signed 4 November 2013)
Total Funds Received to Date:	USD 2,914,946
Total Expenditures:	1 January 2013 to 30 June 2015: USD 2,198,324 ²

¹ For operational reasons, the project was kept active into 2016 and could therefore not be reported earlier, cf. the narrative below.

² This figure includes expenses related to returns under the programme up until March 2016.

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1. SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

The *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project (AVRR-DK)* intended to contribute to the development and offer of general Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Services (AVRR) for asylum seekers in Denmark. It was designed to facilitate primarily the return and reintegration operations under the so-called support programme (*Støtteordningen*).³ The support programme was established through Bill No. 56 accepted in the Danish Parliament on 18 December 2012 and originally expected to cater for the return of 250 persons applying for voluntary return between 18 December 2012 and 1 July 2013. Only persons who had arrived to Denmark and applied for asylum before the acceptance date of Bill No. 56 were eligible for the support. Bill No. 56 was kept confidential until its acceptance, wherefore IOM did not know of the Bill previously and also could not influence eligibility and other criteria defined therein.

The support programme for the first time offered assisted voluntary return and reintegration support to broader groups of asylum seekers in Denmark, although its scope was limited only to those who had arrived in Denmark before 18 December 2012. When IOM was requested by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) to implement the pilot project facilitating AVRR in accordance with the already accepted Bill, IOM immediately began developing and negotiating the project with the DIS. The launch of the project was however constrained by the fact that IOM had only limited staff presence in Denmark and therefore had to hire needed staff to become fully operational for the implementation. In light of this situation, a 1st amendment was signed with DIS to slightly increase the number of persons to whom IOM would agree to pay support even if they returned voluntarily with other actors at the beginning of programme.

Despite these initial launch constraints, IOM was immediately able to draw on the organization's considerable experience with AVRR in Denmark and globally, wherefore the first returns with IOM took place already in February 2013. When realizing that original intention to facilitate the return of 250 persons within nine months (before 30 September 2013) was unrealistic for a short-term programme with limited application time, the DIS agreed to increase the funding to the project while hoping also that the number of returns would increase to 500 (2nd Amendment to the agreement).

IOM supported the achievement of the project objective by developing, setting up and implementing procedures and facilitating AVRR to a broader group of eligible persons in Denmark, who had hitherto not been eligible for AVRR. Specifically:

- In coordination with the DIS and other partners, IOM developed procedures for registration, follow-up and implementation of returns and payments of reintegration assistance in countries of origin. While the dialogue with the donor continued throughout the project on identified needs and improvements, IOM quickly had the procedures in place for the implementation of this pilot project.

³ Hereinafter, "project" refers mainly to the project document agreed between the DIS and IOM defining IOM's responsibilities in the overall support programme. However, the terms may also from time to time be used interchangeably.

- IOM arranged the return of total 216 persons in this project (67 females, 149 males), including four persons who returned only in March 2016. In addition, IOM arranged the voluntary return of seven vulnerable persons under a special return programme for vulnerable persons but eligible for reintegration support under both projects. Based on the first amendment signed between IOM and DIS, an additional 76 eligible persons returned voluntarily to their countries of origin with other partners. A total of **299 eligible persons** therefore returned to their Countries of Origin during the programme.⁴ The largest group of beneficiaries were **Afghan nationals**.
- IOM coordinated the payment of cash reintegration grants and cash support for start-up of business activities in support of sustainable reintegration for the majority of eligible persons.⁵
- IOM paid special attention to **vulnerable returnees** requiring special assistance during or after travel. This included *inter alia* support paid to vulnerable cases returning under other project structures (mainly Victims of Trafficking) as well as attention to any medical issues that could affect travel and arrangement of escorts when needed. IOM arranged escort travel on two separate instances to **Afghanistan** and one to **Georgia**. A fourth escort had been arranged for a return to **Iraq** but was cancelled prior to departure due to the security situation in the final destination (Mosul).
- IOM expanded and fortified its cooperation on AVRR with not only Danish partners such as the asylum centres, the Red Cross, Danish Refugee Council and Danish authorities, but also with foreign embassies accredited to Denmark.

Further details related to applicant profiles and returns are provided here below. It should be noted that IOM in most cases only has detailed information on persons who returned with IOM, wherefore the statistics in some places refer to the return of all eligible persons (299), in other places to those who returned with IOM under the project (216).

AVRR statistics

Return countries:

IOM registered the return of total 299 persons under the programme. The majority of these returns took place to Afghanistan with 90 persons or 30 per cent of all returns. The following large return destinations were the Russian Federation with 54 persons (18 per cent), Belarus with 33 persons (11 per cent) and Iraq 27 persons (9 per cent). See Figure 1 for a breakdown of the return countries.

It is remarkable that Afghanistan was the largest return destination, considering that returns to Afghanistan have been a priority to Danish authorities for a number of years. One explanation for the relatively large number of returns to Afghanistan could be the offer of return and cash assistance

⁴ IOM was however not always informed of returns implemented by other partners, wherefore IOM figures may differ from those of the Danish Immigration Service. The figure of 299 persons also does not include returns of eligible persons under other project structures as late as 2017.

⁵ IOM was unable to coordinate payments for two eligible persons to Somalia due to IOM policy on returns to Somalia at the time. Two persons to Afghanistan were paid by the Danish Embassy because IOM did not have a valid project code. For two other eligible persons to Afghanistan – two brothers, of which one a child – IOM refused return and reintegration assistance altogether because of IOM policy on returns of vulnerable persons such as unaccompanied migrant children.

under this programme combined with a complementary offer of in-kind reintegration assistance in Afghanistan. The latter programme was implemented by IOM Kabul and thus contributed to an overall increased level of support and return sustainability for returnees to Afghanistan.

Under the programme, returns with support took place to 34 countries (Figure 1). This can be compared to IOM facilitated voluntary returns from Denmark from 2005 to 2012 that were generally in smaller numbers and from five to ten different destinations (or less) on a yearly basis. This would indicate that the introduction of AVRR support to broader groups of asylum seekers in Denmark had a direct effect on the number of nationalities accessing voluntary return.

Even so, the decision of various nationalities and individual persons to opt for assisted voluntary return at any given time cannot be explained by an offer of reintegration assistance alone. As for example Iraqi nationals from Denmark were offered considerable voluntary return and reintegration assistance during the so-called contractual arrangements from 2007 to 2009, when the return numbers of Iraqi nationals nevertheless remained smaller than during this pilot project with less specific focus on Iraq (27 returns to Iraq, see Figure 1). On the other hand, 60-80 per cent of the large IOM return figures in 2003 and 2004 were Iraqi nationals, but in receipt of approximately the same cash support as under this programme. Whether a given person chooses to return voluntarily is therefore not only a question of the available support, but also of the support being available at the right time.

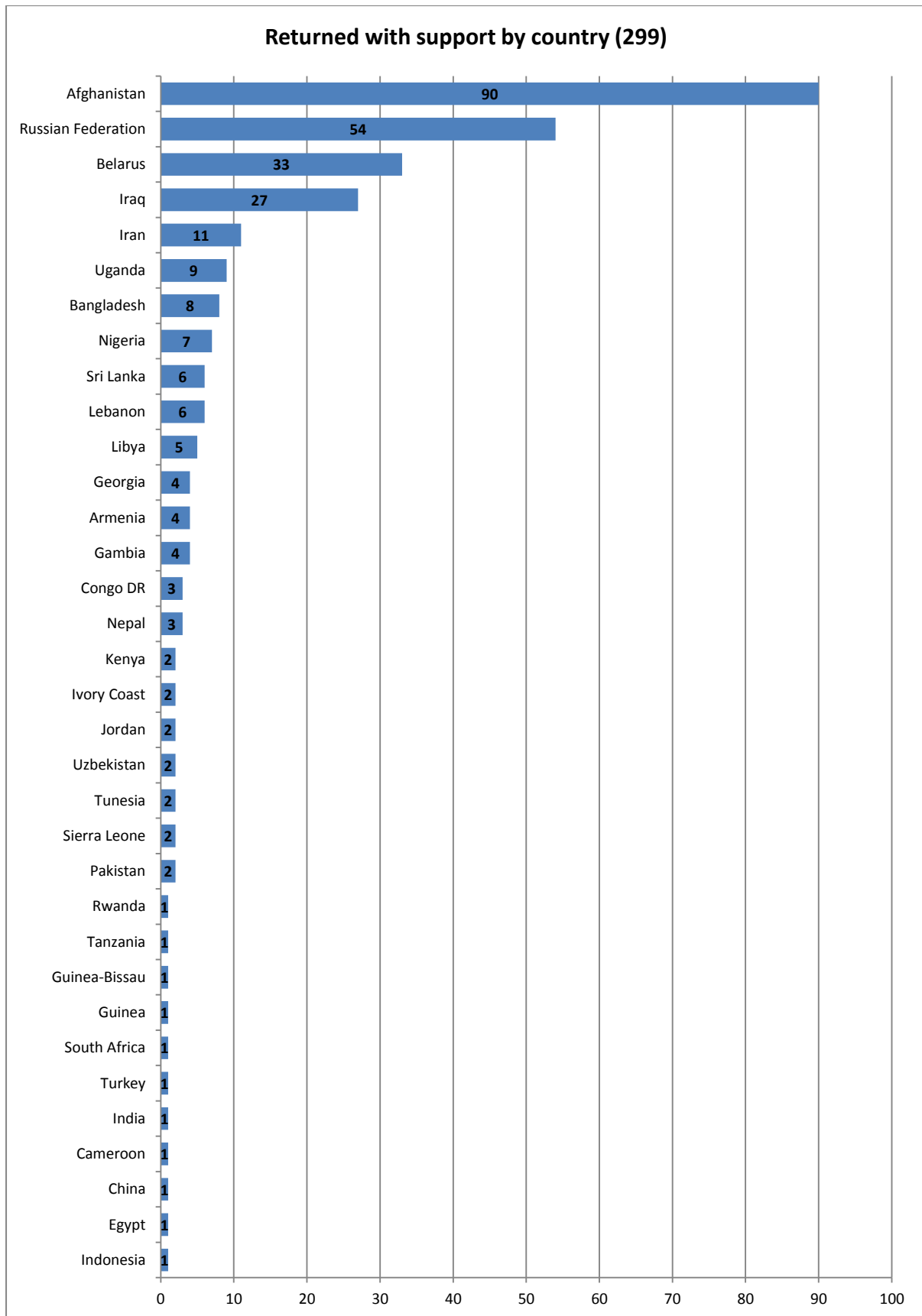


Figure 1

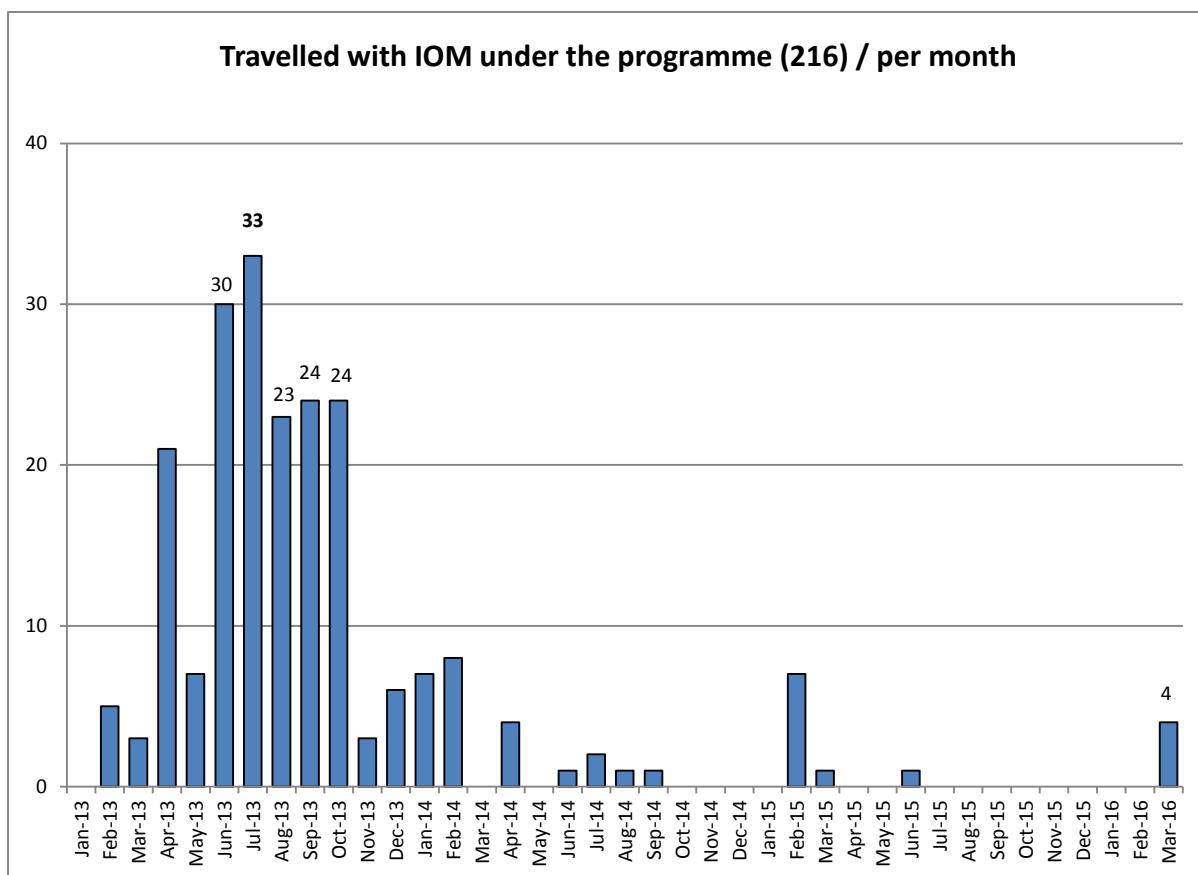


Figure 2

As shown by figure 2, depicting the 216 returns arranged by IOM directly under the project up until March 2016, there were relatively large numbers of monthly returns from June to October 2013, reaching a maximum of 33 returns in July 2013. Hereafter the number of returns per month decreased with only sporadic returns towards the end of the project. The last four persons to return with IOM under the project travelled in March 2016 after issuance of travel documents from the relevant embassy.⁶

While every decision to return voluntarily is individual and the number of monthly applications and returns cannot be predicted or explained with certainty, there are different possible explanations for the frontloading of the returns in the programme. According to IOM figures, of the 216 returns arranged by IOM under the project, more than 75 per cent applied for the support in the period January-June 2013.⁷ That is, within the first six months of the programme. Even if the application period was later extended from 1 July to 31 December 2013 by decision of the Danish authorities, the majority of applications and returns were still found at the beginning of the programme.

⁶ Persons eligible for support travelled as late as April 2017 with the assistance of IOM but received cash support directly by the DIS coordinated with IOM. At the time of writing (July 2017), a few open cases remain eligible for support although IOM cannot pay further grants following the closure of the project. See also section three of this report.

⁷ 1 July 2013 was also the original deadline to apply for support, before the deadline was extended until 31 December 2013.

It is likely that the sheer novelty of the support caused a number of applicants to apply shortly after the establishment of the programme, including persons who had already decided to return and now saw a possibility to receive support not available to them earlier.

Following the large number of applications to the programme from January till June 2013, IOM arranged as many of the returns as operationally possible in those months and thereafter, although some cases would take a longer time to prepare due to collection of information, applications for travel documents and other operational arrangements.

2. PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS REALIZING OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

The project realized the project outcomes and outputs as detailed below:

- **Outcome 1: Eligible asylum seekers are aware to make a decision on AVRR and increasingly cooperate with IOM on their voluntary return from Denmark**

In IOM's experience, it is crucial for the effectiveness and trust amongst applicants to an AVRR programme that applicants and counsellors receive clear and structured guidance on procedures, responsibilities and procedures. This facilitates smooth cooperation with beneficiaries and project partners, but also supports the ability to make an informed decision on voluntary return. When the programme was established in December 2012 and IOM and the DIS had signed the project funding agreement, IOM quickly worked to set up necessary procedures and application documents (AVRR forms). The documentation was made available on an IOM specific webpage under www.iom.fi in February 2013. Not only was it important for stakeholders and eligible applicants to know of the existence of the programme, but also to give them unhindered access to necessary guidance, including from IOM.

- **Output 1.1: AVRR assistance has been offered and explained in a consistent manner to returnees for the duration of the project**

While IOM initially had no formal role in the outreach to and return counselling of applicants under the programme – this was on donor decision primarily done by non-IOM counsellors – IOM still offered extensive telephone guidance to persons who had already applied or considered to do so. In support of general counselling by other actors, IOM produced or collected various materials that were shared with partners electronically to facilitate counselling. This included *inter alia* guidance note on IOM procedures, instructions on travel documents and travel practicalities, information on hand luggage regulations and contact lists of IOM staff etc.

- **Output 1.2: AVRR pre-departure, travel and post-arrival assistance has been provided consistently to eligible returnees in accordance with project criteria**

For the duration of the programme, IOM had the main operational responsibility for returns and payments of cash reintegration grants. The return assistance was based on IOM's unprecedented expertise and practical experience in the area of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration as well as the organization's national and international networks. IOM consistently

registered new cases approved for support by the DIS and followed up with beneficiaries, counsellors and Danish authorities to receive necessary information for the processing and implementation of returns. When needed, IOM supported applicants in the acquisition of travel documentation and other IDs, including coordination with and visits to embassies in Copenhagen, or visits of foreign embassies to Denmark when personal interviews were mandatory for travel document issuance. IOM arranged international flight bookings, coordinated transportation to Copenhagen Airport in Denmark as well as airport departure assistance in Copenhagen and assistance at transit points. IOM arranged arrival assistance in countries of origin and transportation to the final destination. In some instances, IOM organized temporary accommodation for returnees who could not continue their travel in the country of origin on the day of arrival, and arranged payment and shipment of excess luggage.

When informing IOM missions in countries of return of planned return movements, IOM Copenhagen forwarded instructions on eligible cash reintegration grants and cash support for business start-up to be paid to beneficiaries, including copies of travel documents for identification. Payments were carried out in countries of return in accordance with the organization's financial standards and related approval procedures. Depending on the return country, reintegration grants were paid as either cash or by cheque, or by bank transfer when this was doable.

When a return had been implemented, IOM confirmed to the Danish authorities that the person had left Denmark and arrived to her/his home country.

– **Outcome 2: Return stakeholders in Denmark are able to advise applicants on project criteria and refer persons to IOM for voluntary return assistance**

Compared to IOM's voluntary return assistance in Denmark in the years prior to 2013, IOM under the support programme received applications from and coordinated applications and returns with more diverse stakeholders. The underlying reason for the involvement of a broader spectrum of partners was probably the overall coordination by the DIS, who involved and shared information with a larger number of partners such as asylum centres, NGOs, the police, and IOM. Prior to the programme, returns were by default coordinated mainly by the police.

The offer of cash reintegration support in relation to an application for voluntary return may also have increased the buy-in of asylum centre staff and other stakeholders in discussing the option of voluntary return with potential applicants. Although IOM does not have hard evidence to support this, IOM was told by various stakeholders without a traditional return mandate that they found it easier to discuss the subject of return when it was considered a supportive action rather than just adherence to an obligation following an asylum claim rejection.

In support of the outcome, IOM proactively and throughout the project strived to share information with the same parties on IOM's roles, procedures and principles to allow for transparent communication and efficient processing.

– **Output 2.1: Return stakeholders in Denmark have received information on the programme and IOM AVRRR assistance**

Up until 31 December 2013, after which it was no longer possible to apply for the support and IOM therefore primarily processed already received applications, IOM met regularly with other stakeholders such as the DIS, the police and the Danish Refugee Council. IOM did not participate in the initial round of information meetings in asylum centres at the beginning of the programme, but the donor agreed to let IOM participate in the second round of meetings towards late summer 2013. IOM also on several instances met with applicants at centres or at the UN City in Copenhagen to inform them of IOM services, travel document procedures and the progress of their application. Moreover, as part of its abovementioned counselling support, IOM continuously reached out to DIS and other partners to explain and clarify what documents and information were needed in order to proceed with processing and travel arrangements, such as contact details of applicants, information on national IDs and possible travel documents in the asylum file etc.

Although meetings with Danish return stakeholders were important for the overall coordination and communication, IOM paid special attention to meetings with and information to foreign embassies that were crucial in assisting with travel document issuance for applicants. IOM consequently informed approached embassies of the services provided by IOM to their nationals under the support programme, stressing that all returns arranged by IOM are voluntary. IOM believes that the information provided to embassies particularly on voluntary return by IOM was instrumental in receiving travel documents and hence in facilitating returns.

– **Output 2.2: Electronic and printed information materials have been produced and shared with partners on a regular basis**



In February 2013, IOM published a project specific webpage under the address www.iom.fi, where the launch of the support programme was announced. IOM eventually made a number of electronic materials available for download on the same page, including DIS information materials and application

forms. Easier access to DIS materials was often requested by stakeholders contacting IOM. A screenshot from the front page of www.iom.fi and the project webpage can be seen here beside and below.

The screenshot shows the IOM Office in Helsinki website. The main header includes the IOM logo and navigation links for Home, About IOM, Themes, Projects, Publications, and Jobs. The page features a sidebar with 'Current Projects' and a main content area for the 'Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Support to Asylum Seekers in Denmark Pilot Project (AVRR-DK)'. The project description states that IOM will provide Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) arrangements and pay reintegration cash grants to approximately 250 eligible asylum seekers returning voluntarily from Denmark. The project duration is from 1 January 2013 to 31 October 2013. The target group consists of asylum seekers in Denmark. Project partners include the Danish Immigration Service, the Danish Police, and the Danish Refugee Council. Countries involved are return countries, excluding EU/EFTA and countries where nationals are processed under the manifestly unfounded asylum procedure. The donor is the Danish Immigration Service. A search bar and 'How to apply?' section are also visible on the right side of the page.

IOM designed a project poster in size A3 providing basic information on the contact details of IOM. The poster was distributed to asylum centres and other stakeholders in personal meetings and by mail. A copy of the poster is included to this report as Annex 2.

IOM regularly shared statistical updates through a mailing list containing more than 100 e-mail addresses of return counsellors, police officers and others in contact with IOM under the auspices of the programme. A number of these e-mail addresses were shared addresses and mailboxes, wherefore the information is estimated to have reached well over 100 persons. The format and information level of the forwarded statistics were regularly modified to suit the information purposes of the project partners. This included as for example status updates, processing time, focus on special nationalities etc.

Table 2.1: Progress Achieved Compared to Indicators in the Results Matrix

	<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Baseline</i>	<i>Target</i>	<i>Progress made during the reporting period</i>
Objective: To contribute to the development and offer of general Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) services for asylum seekers in Denmark	Percentage of the number of eligible migrants who choose to voluntarily return	Baseline: 0	Target: up to 10% of eligible migrants participate in the program in the 9 months of the pilot project	Bill No. 56 estimated that max. 3,000 persons would make use of the programme. With 299 registered returns, the 10% target was almost met, although not within the originally envisaged 9 months of the project. IOM considers the target partially met.
Outcome 1: Eligible asylum seekers are aware to make a decision on AVRR and increasingly cooperate with IOM on their voluntary return from Denmark	Number of migrants living in Denmark under the asylum system who voluntarily return	Baseline: about 40 returnees per year have returned since 2005	Target: up to 250 returnees have returned under the project Target of 2 nd Amendment to the Agreement: 500 returnees	IOM registered a total of 299 returns with support under the project. The original target of 250 persons was therefore met. However, the reviewed target of 500 persons in the 2 nd amendment to the Agreement was not met.
Output 1.1: AVRR assistance has been offered and explained in a consistent manner to returnees for the duration of the project	Guidance note on application and travel procedures for project partners produced	Indicator: Yes/No	Target: Yes	Guidance note on application and travel procedures produced and distributed to partners electronically. The target was met.
Activities 1.1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design and distribute project specific AVRR application forms - Receive, process and confirm eligibility of AVRR applications in coordination with project partners - Clarify procedures for receiving, filling and forwarding AVRR applications with project partners and produce guidance note for project partners - Offer telephone and direct counselling to applicants and returnees approaching IOM 				
Output 1.2: AVRR pre-departure, travel and post-arrival assistance has been provided consistently to	Percentage of eligible applicants to the programme that return and receive reintegration assistance	Baseline: 0	Target: 80%	While the figures of IOM and the DIS might differ according to registration practices, IOM has counted 462 approved

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eligible returnees in accordance with project criteria				persons referred to IOM, of which some eventually travelled while others cancelled. With a total return number of 299 and a percentage of approximately 65%, the target was not met.
<p>Activities 1.2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate voluntary returns from Denmark and reintegration cash payments in countries of return - Support returnees in acquisition of needed travel and other documentation - Arrange domestic and international transportation for returnees - Provide departure assistance at Copenhagen Airport, and transit and reception assistance where available - Organize temporary accommodation in cases where returnees are unable to continue their domestic travel in the country of return on the day of arrival - Pay for possible excess luggage upon departure from Copenhagen Airport, and coordinate excess luggage payments at transit airports through IOM offices - Provide escorts to returnees with special needs, such as persons with medical conditions - Assess eligibility and coordinate reintegration cash payments in countries of origin on a case by case basis also for a limited number of returnees that may have returned voluntarily from Denmark outside of this project 				
<p>Outcome 2: Return stakeholders in Denmark are able to advise applicants on project criteria and refer persons to IOM for voluntary return assistance:</p>	Number of different entities that refer applicants to IOM for AVRR assistance	Baseline: 1 (police referrals only)	Target: 5 (DIS, DRC, different embassies, reception centres)	IOM registered referrals of cases from the DIS, the DRC, the police, private persons, returnees and various reception centres, but not from embassies. It can be noted however that the majority of cases were submitted to IOM from the DIS and would therefore figure with DIS as the source although the original referral source was another entity. IOM believes that the target was partially met.
<p>Output 2.1: Return stakeholders in Denmark have received information on the programme and IOM AVRR assistance</p>	Number of different partners and stakeholders informed of the programme	Baseline: 0	Target: 10 meetings with reception centres and partners, 10 embassies informed	IOM met bilaterally with embassies on seven different occasions and corresponded with approximately 20 different embassies on the services

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				<p>offered by IOM under the programme. IOM also meet with project partners (Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Ministry of Justice, DIS, police etc) on various occasions, and visited several reception centres alone or together with the DRC for outreach purposes. IOM considers that the target was met.</p>
<p>Activities 2.1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize information meetings on project criteria and voluntary procedures for staff in reception centres to facilitate their counselling of potential applicants - Organize regular coordination meetings with project partners, mainly in the Copenhagen area - Offer advice and return updates to reception centre staff and other return stakeholders through telephone and personal meetings - Inform embassies accredited to Denmark of project criteria and IOM Assisted Voluntary Return services in Denmark - Stakeholders in Denmark are available for meetings and show interest in receiving information about the programme 				
<p>Output 2.2: Electronic and printed information materials have been produced and shared with partners on a regular basis</p>	<p>Availability of 1) electronic and 2) printed materials</p>	<p>1. Indicator: Yes/No (webpage, statistical updates) 2. Indicator: Yes/No (project posters)</p>	<p>1. Target: Yes 2. Target: Yes</p>	<p>1. IOM informed of the launch of the support programme on iom.fi and produced a dedicated webpage with relevant project information, including links to DIS information materials. The target was met. 2. IOM produced a project poster and distributed the printed version to Danish partners. The target was met.</p>
<p>Activities 2.2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish project specific webpage on www.iom.fi from where application forms and other materials can be downloaded, including DIS produced information materials - Design, print, and distribute multi-lingual project poster in 100 copies (A3) containing contact information of IOM and project partners to facilitate contact to IOM and its partners - Distribute monthly return statistics to project partners 				

3. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND ACTIONS TAKEN

Some of the major challenges encountered during project implementation were the following:

1. Project setup and procedures not agreed in advance led to confusion on procedures

Because Bill No. 56 was kept confidential until the day after its acceptance, the implementing partners, including IOM, had no influence on central elements of the programme design. All procedures and documentation were therefore not agreed upon in advance and could only be developed in detail while the pilot project was already supposed to be operational. This led to confusion amongst stakeholders and beneficiaries as to what they should do, including applicants not knowing whom to approach or how to apply for return and reintegration. For a considerable length of time, IOM only received support decisions containing basic information on the approved persons, but no direct contact information, filled-in AVRR form or information on national documents, information which IOM therefore had to request separately.

→ **Action taken:** Based on the organization's standard operating procedures on return, IOM did its utmost to coordinate and develop procedures with the donor and other authorities, and to provide as clear and structured guidance as possible to both applicants and stakeholders.

2. Project launch not known in advance caused delays in implementation

As a projectized organization, IOM did not have full staff capacity in Copenhagen to implement the project when the support programme was announced in December 2012. This would have required the funding agreement to have been signed well before the acceptance of the Bill and hence for IOM to commence the hiring process for needed staff in advance.

→ **Action taken:** IOM launched the project with existing staff capacity in Copenhagen and Helsinki, drawing on the organization's existing know-how and return networks. As such, IOM was able to arrange the first returns under the project in February 2013. It is nevertheless a distinct possibility that implementation would have been smoother and returns overall higher if the project and staff setup had been clear and operational from the very beginning of the programme, when there was a high interest in the support amongst asylum seekers in Denmark.

3. Lengthy and bureaucratic procedures for closing or rejecting cases

Various issues related to the procedures for closing or rejecting cases under the programme:

1) Firstly, due to the programme setup as defined by the Danish authorities, IOM would be informed by the DIS only of applicants approved for support. This in extension meant that DIS was not in a formal position to inform IOM when applicants for some reason had been rejected. Applicants who had applied for AVRR through IOM, and for whom IOM had coordinated the support application with the DIS, were therefore in a number of instances registered with IOM as pending an eligibility decision, whereas the DIS had already decided that they were ineligible but without informing IOM.

→ **Action taken:** IOM actively and regularly followed up on pending cases with the DIS to determine if a decision had been made in the case or not. DIS could still not inform IOM if a case had been rejected, but if IOM was told that a decision had already been made – and a positive eligibility decision had not been forwarded – IOM could infer that the case was not eligible under the programme. For such cases, IOM followed up with the applicant to hear if s/he still wanted to return voluntarily from Denmark with IOM however without support under the programme.

2) Secondly, if IOM considered that applicants were not cooperating and in reality did not intend to return voluntarily, it was not possible for IOM to close the case even when the non-cooperation was obvious. As per programme procedures, the DIS had to go through a consultative procedure with the applicant before the support could be withdrawn and the applicant declared ineligible. While this provided extra safeguards for the applicants, it also meant that some cases formally remained open for a considerable length of time even when it was clear to IOM that the person was not going to return. Some applicants could also through the consultative procedure inform the DIS that they considered themselves cooperative, whereas they in IOM's experience were not, and thus extend their stay in Denmark by claiming cooperation but not e.g. providing necessary information for the travel document application.

→ **Action taken:** Upon receiving information that a case should remain eligible, IOM followed up with the person to again request the needed documentation, as for example AVR form or documentation needed for travel document issuance. When applicants continued to demonstrate non-cooperation, IOM requested a new consultative procedure for the applicant from the DIS.

3) The formal difficulties of closing cases had the adverse consequence that cases could also remain open and eligible for an extended period of time. Once an applicant was considered eligible, the person could not formally lose the support until DIS had formally withdrawn it. This was for example when the delay in implementing the return was not caused by the applicants but by lengthy embassy procedures. While IOM considers it appropriate and fair that applicants should not lose their eligibility for reasons outside of their own control, it was an administrative challenge to keep the option of return and payment of support open in the framework of a non-permanent return project. As long as expenses could still be expected, IOM could not formally close the project and consequently not submit the final report to the donor. As mentioned earlier, the last four returns under the project took place only in March 2016. Some support decisions were withdrawn by the DIS in November 2016, whereas two persons still eligible to receive support returned with IOM under other project structures as late as April 2017.

→ **Action taken:** IOM proactively followed up with embassies and other partners on pending cases in order to finalize all returns as soon as possible. It should however be recognized that it will not always be possible to speed up procedures for travel document issuance, dependent as they are on the cooperation of multiple parties and formal documentation requirements. Based on regular reviews of open cases

and hence assessments of return prospects, IOM requested no-cost extensions (NCE) from the donor necessary to keep the project structure valid. The number of NCEs of the project mentioned in the project data table bear witness to the necessity of keeping the IOM project structure valid for as long as returns under the project were foreseen. If the programme had been permanent or at least had a longer duration, or it had been possible to transfer the open cases to a new programme, IOM would not have needed to request NCEs. In 2016, although the donor and IOM had not signed an NCE beyond 30 June 2015, it was agreed with the donor to exceptionally reopen the project structure allowing IOM to facilitate the return of the last four persons under the project in March 2016. Within the limits of IOM standard projectization of expenses, IOM flexibly tried to find and coordinate solutions for returns taking place also after the formal end date of the project to avoid beneficiaries not receiving their entitlements.

4. Number of applications and returns remained lower than expected

Even after the extension of the application period until 31 December 2013 in order to give more persons the opportunity to apply, application numbers remained lower than expected at the time of acceptance of Bill No. 56.

→ **Action taken:** IOM did its best to support counsellors in the provision of information on the programme in support of higher application numbers. IOM counselled asylum seekers contacting IOM on programme criteria and submitted applications to the DIS on behalf of interested asylum seekers. However, the challenge remained that asylum applicants from 2013 onwards could not receive the support. The application pattern to the programme would seem to indicate that eligible persons were prone to decide on return and apply relatively quickly, whereas a later application deadline and therefore longer reflection time did not translate into a correspondingly higher number of applications from the group of eligible persons.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Danish pilot AVRR programme was launched on short notice after the acceptance of Bill No. 56 in Parliament in December 2012, with the initial returns by IOM taking place in February 2013. The project was the first of its kind in Denmark. Despite the short notice, IOM was able to register and process applications and implement return all through the reporting period thanks to the organizations establishes structures and existing know-how on AVRR. Returns were arranged to a wide array of countries and regions during the project, including to countries that are known to be a return priority for Danish authorities. The project also catered for returns of families with children as well as the requirements of vulnerable returnees in need of escorts or other special attention.

The implementation of a pilot project will by nature present obstacles that have not been encountered earlier, as well as issues that need to be discussed and agreed upon while operations are ongoing. Even so, IOM finds that the project overall succeeded in facilitating voluntary returns of relatively large group of asylum seekers to countries not previously in receipt of AVRR assistance

from Denmark. This had a visible effect on return numbers compared to previous years, increased coordination between different stakeholders as well as overall increased focus on returns in Denmark in 2013. The largest return destination under the programme was Afghanistan (90 persons), followed by the Russian Federation (primarily to the Caucasus Region), Belarus, Iraq and Iran.

It has been noted earlier in this report that the revised target of 500 returns was not met. The main reason for this is that fewer than 500 persons applied and were considered eligible for support by the DIS. Theoretically, even if 500 persons had been considered eligible by the DIS, the number of actual returns would in IOM's experience have remained somewhat smaller because cancellations are inevitable in all return arrangements, be it returns facilitated by IOM or by national authorities.

Even if it had been possible for asylum seekers who arrived to Denmark after 18 December 2012 to apply for the support, it is likely that the programme would in any case have seen an initial spike in the number of applications in the first months of the programme. However, with an enlarged group of eligible persons there might also have been a consistently higher number of monthly applications and returns throughout. As it were, the returns towards the end of the project were primarily those who had decided to apply shortly before the application deadline and/or for whom it for various reasons was a lengthy process to acquire travel documentation.

At the time of the highest interest in the programme, from June till October 2013, IOM arranged on average 27 returns per month under the project. If this return pace had continued from June 2013 till June 2015, when the programme formally ended, there would have been more than 600 returns. The lower number of returns is therefore not a question of IOM's return capacity alone, but as much of a lower than expected number of applications and the applicant profiles. The question is therefore what could have been done in order to increase the number of persons applying and returning under the programme?

Concerted initial outreach efforts including IOM, agreement on application and return procedures as well as operational capacity from the very beginning of the programme might have supported a more timely response to the needs of return stakeholders and beneficiaries when interest in the programme was at its highest. This would however have required that the implementing partners had been made aware of the planned Bill prior to its acceptance. The extension of the application deadline from 1 July to 31 December 2013 was an attempt to give potential applicants more time to consider voluntary return, but without enlarging the eligible group. Of which some had already applied to return under the programme, while others were less likely to do so if they had not applied within the first six months.

While IOM recognizes Denmark's policy of trying to stem pull-effects by restricting the group of eligible persons to those who arrived in Denmark before the acceptance of the Bill, it would have had an important impact on the overall return number if persons arriving to Denmark after 18 December 2012 had also been eligible. Asylum seekers who are presented with a ready option of AVRR at the time they receive a rejection of their asylum claim, are less adverse to the option of return than those who receive an offer of AVRR only months after a rejection. The more time passes between a rejection of the asylum claim and the launch of an AVRR programme, and the longer time spent in the host country, the more difficult it becomes for the individual to accept the idea of return as a feasible option.

The programme target group remained the same throughout, which is reflected in the return figures. However, the programme also contributed to increase the general attention to voluntary returns in Denmark amongst asylum seekers and return stakeholders. With the overall attention and the offer of an IOM voluntary return with support, the programme in no small part contributed to making 2013 a record year in terms of returns from Denmark.

The practices of the pilot programme contributed to the setup of a second support programme from Denmark in March 2015. This second programme was likewise defined in a Bill kept confidential until its acceptance. The 2015 Bill copied most of the structures and procedures from the pilot programme, but also included important changes such as defining a longer programme duration from the outset. Additionally, the project partners in the 2015 programme were able to draw on the cooperation networks and lessons learned from the pilot programme, wherefore implementation was comparatively smoother from the beginning. As such, the pilot project in line with the objective continued to have an impact on the overall return framework in Denmark through the provision of tested and accepted cooperation models for AVRR.

IOM is pleased to have been given the opportunity to cooperate with the Danish Immigration Service and other partners on the project, to the benefit of particularly asylum seekers in Denmark in need of voluntary return and reintegration support. IOM stands ready to provide input to any future planned Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes from Denmark, based on the organization's long experience with the design and implementation of return activities in Denmark and globally.

5. EXPENDITURES AND RESOURCE UTILIZATION

In addition to the attached financial report, please note the following:

- When the project formally ended on 30 June 2015, IOM was still discussing with the donor if an NCE would still be needed. Unwilling to sign an NCE for four planned returns, it was accepted by the donor that IOM could exceptionally reopen the project structure to arrange the last returns under the programme in March 2016. Because these expenses were accepted by the donor and no immediate returns were foreseen, no NCE was signed.

6. ANNEXES

Annex 1: IOM Guidance Note

Annex 2: IOM Project Poster



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

**ASSISTED VOLUNTARY RETURN AND REINTEGRATION SUPPORT TO ASYLUM
SEEKERS IN DENMARK PILOT PROJECT (AVRR-DK)**

FINAL FINANCIAL REPORT

for the period from January 2013 to 30 June 2015

USD

CONTRIBUTIONS

Government of Denmark - Danish Immigration Service (DIS)		
April 2013		892,650
October 2013		892,650
June 2014		1,129,646
<u>Total resources</u>		<u>2,914,946</u>

EXPENSES

	<u>Budget</u>	
Staff expenses	621,051	634,912
Office expenses	189,289	135,602
Operational expenses		
Costs related to travel document acquisition	7,500	4,653
Visit of consular staff to Denmark for travel documents	3,000	2,723
Domestic travel of returnees to airport in Denmark	17,000	8,087
International transportation, transit and reception assistance	315,000	136,633
Excess luggage payments	43,245	17,540
Temporary accommodation and refreshments for long transits	5,500	1,575
Round trip and subsistence allowance for escorts	11,000	3,840
Cash reintegration grants	1,283,750	841,109
Cash support for startup of business activities	320,400	318,940
Printing, packing and distribution of posters	1,000	248
IOM overhead (12% on Staff & Office Expenses)	97,241	92,462
<u>Total expenses</u>	<u>2,914,976</u>	<u>2,198,324</u>

Balance of resources at 30 June 2015

USD **716,622**

As the responsible project manager, I certify that the financial and narrative reports are correctly stated in accordance with IOM internal rules and procedures.

Simo Röhönen
Sub Regional Coordinator for Finland,
Sweden, Denmark and Estonia
8 May 2017